

MILORI'S GUIDE TO LANGUAGES



A broad definition of the multiverse's dialects...
...for the world's greatest role-playing game.

FOREWORD

My name is Milori, and Cutters like you have long come to me for answers. After the proliferation of the work I'm probably most known for, "The Dabus-Common Phrase-book, or, the Dark Revealed," the frequency with which folk stop me on the street to translate a rebus for them has diminished significantly.

But any day I'm not lecturing or contracting, I can usually count on someone loitering outside my apartment, having been sent there by some berk in a bar. Told that I can help them untangle some puzzle, or translate Uyo, or something or other. I'm glad to help, of course, but here and there I find myself doing the same work over and again. Frankly, I'm tired of explaining that yes, you do have to bite your own tongue to speak Infernal, unless you've got the good fortune to have a forked one.

And so, for the past while I've been working on this book. It contains my own musings on the three most widely spoken language families in the multiverse, and so shouldn't really be taken as gospel. There's still a lot of back and forth in the linguistic community on a lot of what I present. That said, I wholeheartedly believe that this is currently the most accurate and exhaustive description of the very fundamentals of opening your mouth in any of the major planes.

I will first cover the standard languages, then the family known to most as 'Exotic', and finally briefly touch on the most famous constructed languages, or conlangs, that appear on most planes.



STANDARD LANGUAGES

The Standard Languages of the Multiverse are named such because everyone tends to have at least one. If you know two or three of these, you're going to be hard pressed to misunderstand anyone.

COMMON

The Common tongue is perhaps one of the most arresting languages in the multiverse. It defies typical etymology. It's history wheels away into the strange and arcane corners of reality. Attempts to pry it apart tend to send linguists trotting out to the Far Realm, or chasing stone tablets deep in the Underdark and winding up in the Abyss.

What we do know is that Common is very easy to learn, is able to be spoken (or at least approximated (see attempts by the Illthids)) by a majority of folk in the Planes, and lastly, is inexplicably everywhere.

Every material plane has some semblance of it, and no one's quite sure why! Primes who stumble through a portal are often baffled that people still speak the same language as them, albeit sometimes under a different name.

Common is so easy to learn in fact, that many linguists credit a Wizard somewhere with magically constructing it, with that very thing in mind. If this is true, they were almost certainly Human. I posit this for a simple reason; Humans often shirk a lot of their own languages in favour of it.

Now, Human languages are some of my favourites. One must only look at the many Human languages and dialects of the wonderfully diverse Abeir-Toril to find a lot of them.

Despite the existence of Human tongues, Common often becomes the language they prefer to use, even over their own native tongues. One could presume that in her quest to create the most in-between of languages, the Wizard that authored Common accidentally forged a tongue to appeal perfectly to that skittish and mutable species.

It's notable that Common tends to wind up as a *Lingua Franca* (which is itself a term theorised to be from an older dialect of Common), that is, it always manages to weasel itself into the gaps between people.

Common seems to have been so successful at proliferating through the Planes by being the perfect bridge language for disparate cultures, and it often appears on Material Planes to be elected as the language for trade, especially when the two peoples trading each have their own distinct native tongue, such as the Grugach and Dwurfolk of The Flanaess.

Even we Lillend speak it, picking it up somewhere in the murky haze of the past!

It truly is an enigma, made doubly so by the fact that so many academics flock to the Exotic Languages to experience the bizarre and the alien, when it's entirely possible that the most mystifying language of all is right under our noses, on our tongues.





ELVISH

I've received a poem in Elvish twice, and I can only recommend the experience if you have some time on your hands, and maybe someone sober nearby to keep you from doing anything rash.

Elvish, of course, stems directly from Corellon Larethian, as the elves themselves once did.

Like them, the tongue has a divine spark buried in it, and this affords it a subtle power. Even elves themselves are sometimes unaware of what it's truly capable of.

It is commonly known that the language is pleasant to listen to, lends itself well to falsetto, and has a metre and timbre for poetry that is neck and neck with Dwarvish.

Not all sub-species of elves culturally value poetry, but those that do tend to have magnificent canons of lays and epic poems. This phenomenon is something of a stereotype now, and I feel it is my duty to inform people that this is merely the rabbit of the wolf-in-sheep's-clothing.

The divine spark in Elvish also aids the use of magic, be it Arcane, Divine, or Primeval. This edge doesn't necessarily manifest in an obvious manner to most folk; it's not as if elves are all more predisposed to magic than other species are, but it is true that spells exist in Elvish that cannot be translated.

This is true of all languages, but the legend surrounding Elvish spells suggests that at least some of them cannot be translated because they have since taken on a life of their own, and become sentient.

Power like this is why elvish communities tend to police their language in a manner that could seem severe to outsiders, but this is rarely talked about, as it seems perfectly normal to them.

For instance, many elvish communities maintain an accepted catalogue of banned curse words, forbidden due to the fear of the pain they can cause if uttered.

Elves are often stereotyped as feeling emotion very deeply. While it's not true that elves all behave any particular way, it's likely that this stems from their long held belief that offending someone can cause pain equivalent to wounding them.

Perhaps this explains many recurring plot devices in their mythic tradition- elves dying of a broken heart.

DWARVISH

As Elvish sprang from Corellon when the elves did - manifesting seemingly because the multiverse demanded it - Dwarvish was also created by a God, though with much more design and direction.

Moradin, father of the Dwarves, crafted the language with as much precision as he crafted the Dwarves. I'm particularly fond of Dwarvish for the place it holds in their creation myth; after Moradin had finished the first dwarves, he did not count it a success until they spoke.

Dwarvish was long considered the ancestor of Common, as they do share a lot of phonetic and syntactical similarities. This does not count out my theory, as whoever constructed Common could have simply started with Dwarvish as a base.

Whether or not their language is related to any others, it has surely carved out its own place amongst the Planes.

The drive to craft was passed down from Moradin to the Dwarves, and this colours how they speak immensely. A dwarvish sentence is made for one purpose only. The language is highly agglutinative, and allows for nearly endless modification- affix after affix can be applied to a word until the dwarf in question is satisfied that there is no room for mistakes.

Because of this, misunderstandings between native speakers are highly uncommon. Still possible, but if a dwarf has enough time, they can make a sentence crafted perfectly for the specific context they need to use it in.

Dwarves are well-known for their work ethic. Many dwarf cultures are known for smithing, for example, and so these dialects of dwarvish tend to have many phrases designed to give quick instructions around a forge.

There are always outliers, of course. The Unbidden dwarves of Argoloth have long dedicated themselves to their great underground libraries, and so their dialect lends itself less to working metal and more to the regimented indexing of archival work.

And yet, they are indeed the same language! It just happens that the language is like hot steel, and can be moulded by a good enough artisan for nearly any purpose. You might suppose this makes dialects so highly specialised that they become impossible to translate between.

In fact, it's the opposite. The language is pliant and mutable, but can quickly be reorganised into a dialect that works best to speak with other dwarves. Most dwarves have this innate knowledge lurking within them sub-consciously, born with the ability, much like how a Rakshasa has an intrinsic understanding of disguise, or how all sub-species' of Yugoloth organically know how to fall through a loophole in spacetime and wind up somewhere else.

Many linguists, myself included, attribute this to the language's creator, Moradin, who likely anticipated his children expanding over the planes, and making provisions for them running across each other.



*Tomas Ducek
"Paladin"*



GNOMISH

Gnomish, I'm happy to report, is hilarious. Studying this language made for some of the most fun I've ever had in libraries.

First of all, the lexicon is so staggeringly large you have to laugh at it. Gnomes have a word for everything they've ever seen, or can imagine. They have plenty of words to describe the unimaginable too.

The lexicon allows for extremely fine distinctions between alike concepts. This makes it ideal for design and architecture, which could have either preceeded or been influenced by the tendency for many gnomes abroad picking up the work of artificers and inventors. Academics of other species have latched onto this, and it's widely become accepted in some planes as a language best used for scholarly pursuits.

I'm sure if the gnomes who still live in their hidden communities found out about this, they'd see the comical side, as after spending some time learning the language I can report that they tend to use their languages capabilities to make fine distinctions between... less than scholarly things.

For example, the Gnomish lexicon has entries like:

Obb-off: "I accidentally ate the whole thing."

Yargle: "To move hot food around in your mouth."

Yapya: "The act of tapping someone's far shoulder to fool them."

Lemull: "Someone unlucky. Specifically prone to dropping things."

Lapoll: "Someone unlucky. Specifically prone to having things dropped on them."

Gnomish also has multiple entries in the lexicon for types of romantic or platonic love. Two of my favourites are:

Unuy-ull: "The sense upon learning someone's name that you are going to fall in love with them"

Omon-offe: "The emotion associated with locking eyes across a crowded room with a stranger and knowing you are both attracted to each other."

Also noteworthy is that Gnomish is actually a cousin of Dwarvish. As far as I can tell, the origin of the Gnomes is murky, but they did spend time underground in their formative years with the dwarves, when both species were young. The two languages share a few cognates, and are written in the same alphabet.

GIANT

Giants are one of the oldest sentient species in our multiverse, nearly as old as their rivals, the dragons. The races of giant can all trace their lineage back to Annam the All-Father, though peering back so far in time makes it difficult to say if their speech came from Annam directly or not.

In fact, I personally believe the giants created their own language.

Annam (who I think we can now all agree was somewhat... unbalanced) first created the giants with the explicit intent that they would have dominion over the planes he put them on, and to this end he gave them the tools to build an empire, but most records agree he didn't do any of the legwork himself!

It is widely accepted that the ancient giant civilisation Ostoria is the birthplace of their language, which is possibly the last remaining piece of the empire they once had, survived by those who have since picked it up.

It may be worth mentioning that Annam was responsible for placing the giants in their social hierarchy, the Ordning. Gendered languages exist in the planes here and there, but they typically have masculine, feminine, or neutral gendered words.

There are seven genders in the Giant tongue; hill, fire, stone, frost, cloud, storm and 'other', as far as I can tell. The words most associated with each caste of giant in the Ordning tends to be marked as such.

Since I began this chapter last month, there is a human by the name of Volothamp Geddarm who has published a book which includes notes on the Giant language. I must admit it is a weak spot of mine, and so I'd recommend reading that, if you can get your hands on a copy. Was somewhat difficult to get mine into Sigil but that's neither here nor there.

This Volothamp character notes a few interesting things I don't want to leave out.

Firstly, speaking Giant is hard. To do a good job of it, you really ought to have a magically inclined friend cast *Enlarge* on you, so your lungs are a little more suited for the job.

Since doing the research, I've heard of Bashers hurting themselves straining to pronounce a word in Giant with a tiny little set of vocal folds that just aren't cut out for the job. Alternately, get your Wizard friend to just do it themselves with *Thaumaturgy*.

Before we move on, let's touch on Tale Carvings. Many folks consider giants illiterate, as they don't write or read in the same way we do. While some can and do use Dwarven or Common runes, it seems fairly obvious to me that these languages aren't their native orthography.

Tale Carvings are extensive and complicated pictograms used to convey meaning in Giant. It would be a mistake to think of the giants as any less advanced than modern civilisations because they prefer pictograms to words.

As I've always said, if you don't speak someone's language, you can never really be sure how clever they are.





HALFLING

The language of the Halflings is a tricky one to learn.

It's not written down often, and the Halflings, for all their hospitality and good spirits, do not part with it easily.

I will be selective in my report, so as to honour their wishes. I myself had to learn it by spending a great deal of time personally earning the trust and companionship of a village, something I still treasure more than the stories they eventually agreed to teach me.

Halflings are known to be generally affable, but the defining trait of the species is their predisposition for community. Many planes harbour halfling villages that have achieved and then surreptitiously maintained a level of quiet utopia many Bashers could hardly imagine.

The cornerstone of these communities is their oral tradition. They do not keep written histories, even though many other sentient species think of it as a benchmark for civilisation.

Halflings are simply not too concerned with leaving behind a legacy for others to find. Instead, they focus their efforts on maintaining what they have, and adapting it as needed. So, in lieu of writing down their past, the greatest heroes of halfling myth are those who can tell best stories.

A good story to a halfling is one that's memorable, but contains a moral that serves the community. Halfling communities keep an unspoken and unofficial canon of such stories, passed down through the generations, and each halfling is generally expected to know at least one or two, in order to spread them out through the community. These collections of tales would be worth their weight in gold to some academics, together forming a oeuvre of work that, ironically, makes the literate work of other species seem small in comparison.

Halflings take great pride in being known as the bearer of a particular story in their community. It gives them an inherent value to each other that many other societies lack.

The best part, of course, is that they do none of this by design. They simply think it seems like a good idea, and enjoy storytelling at large social gatherings, of which they have several a year.

As such, the Halfling language has been refined and whittled by time and tradition into a language that is absolutely perfect for telling stories to children.

The language, when spoken, is at odds with the unassuming stature of the folk who guard it.

It is ornate, lyrical, lightly rhythmic, and reminds you just how old most halfling communities are. It's not an ancient tongue, by any means, but one spoken so rarely it tends to sound like some lost distant ancestor that belongs alongside Giant or Draconic.

The language also includes an exhaustive index of onomatopoeia, for an comprehensive range of circumstances.

Without saying too much more, I'd like to posit that perhaps they are so slow to share the Halfling tongue because they are so quick to share everything else.

The language truly is their soul and identity in many ways, encoding the tradition they hold dearest, and they prize it as the one thing that makes them uniquely what they are in the Multiverse.

If you want to learn the language from a Halfling friend, my professional opinion is that it's not worth badgering them about it. They have plenty of good stories in Common. If they want to teach it to you, they will of their own volition, and I don't think there's ever going to be any other way to get at it.

ORCISH

Orcish is a dangerous language to discuss, especially with them, as it's been more influenced over the years by Elvish than they'd care to admit.

Orcs and elves have long had a fraught history, and so it follows that the two languages have been in contact for thousands of years, resulting in a slew of loanwords, vowel shifts, and consonant shifts, and what's more, the change is largely one-sided. Elvish has taken few cues from Orcish, but Orcish has adopted a not-insignificant amount of Elvish language features.

The language has long been oral, but orcs have since imported the Dwarvish alphabet in order to write it down when they need to, replacing their older pictographic scripts.

This was a change a pioneered by female orcs, in keeping with the widely accepted fact that it is women and children at the forefront of language change, in any species.

You may think it odd that the Orcs chose to willingly import the Dwarvish alphabet when they have resisted Elvish influence on their speech in the past. My theory is thus; they associate it with the homes Dwarves build, of which orcs are fond, and would build themselves if they knew how.

Orc women are prescribed the role of child-rearing by their religion and culture, and it tracks that they would have been the driving force behind identifying dwarven settlements as a great boon for their communities, leading to the discovery of the alphabet.

The language, unfortunately, has little else to write home about. Orc culture has stagnated under the command of their main deity, Gruumsh, and so the language has remained static for generations.

It holds no special place within their society, besides being credited to Luthic, the fertility goddess of the orc pantheon. They have little in the way of vocals in their music, instead leaning heavily on percussion.

In fact, the most interesting thing about Orcish is that it really ought to be more interesting than it is! Their histories are as long as any other humanoid species', but other than the afore-mentioned language contact with Elvish, it remains virtually unchanged by time.

I'd theorise that it would take a major destabilization of their culture to change the language they speak. A plague or revolution or some such thing. Until then, the language crouches in the dark behind them, stifled by their zealous adherence to the will of Gruumsh, waiting for light and water, so it can grow.

GOBLIN

Goblin is somewhat of a misnomer for the last language in the Standard family, as goblins themselves barely know or use it, poor things. It's Hobgoblins, so often seen commanding other goblinoids, who keep a working knowledge of the language with them.

Under their militaristic gaze, the Goblin language has become tailored for military action.

Words have been shortened and then shortened again, into single-syllable barks that encompass complex tactical adjustments that need to be made in the heat of battle.

Again, don't underestimate how clever someone is, just because you don't understand them.

Hobgoblins are also extremely interested in cartography, as you might expect from their bellicose tendencies.

They are the only goblinoid that keeps libraries, even going so far as to make their collections of scrolls and maps mobile enough to take on campaigns. It is usually close to, or part of, the command centre of a goblin host, and is valued more highly than many members of the host itself.

Because of this tendency to hoard knowledge - I assume a hobgoblin once heard someone say "knowledge is power," and ran with it - the Goblin language is highly irregular and piece-meal. It has been influenced by nearly every other language under the sun, and struggles to find it's own identity amongst everything it has absorbed.

It too uses the Dwarvish alphabet, but unlike Orcish, no one is really sure why. A hobgoblin just decided that was the way it was one day and their word was law.



EXOTIC LANGUAGES

These are the languages a bit further afield, and some folks can't speak any of them! You start running into these, and you know you've *really* started adventuring.

DRACONIC

Draconic is an easy language to spot, as it's usually accompanied by dark smoke coiling out of your mouth, if your accent is correct.

When true dragons speak it, they use tiny goutts of flame to alter a few phonemes when needed, accessing a broader collection of sounds. Other species who study the language a very long time have been known to be able to replicate this language feature, as it's not tied to dragon physiology, but to the magic of the language itself! Without being able to perfect this feature, any true dragon will see through a polymorphed wizard any day of the week. I can only describe the sensation of speaking Draconic correctly as like rolling a hot coal around in your mouth, a sensation which passes quickly.

Dragons are not the only ones who speak it, however! Ever since Kobolds have been around, they've been speaking it; they likely didn't have any language to speak of before they crossed paths with dragons, and had it imprinted on them.

Dragonborn and half-dragons also tend to speak it. Dragonborn who shirk their bloodlines tend to avoid the tongue where they can.

Lizardfolk and yuan-ti are also known to speak it in some capacity, although they rarely manage the finer points of the language.

It's commonly accepted that dragons must have taught the language to them at some point, as many dragons are vain, and are interested mostly in talking to peoples who look like themselves.

Draconic has its own alphabet, which no doubt came long after the oral language had been well established.

The letters and numeral line up with Common well, and so it's generally posited that the alphabet was designed by a non-dragon, though dragons have taken it up themselves.

I loath to constantly postulate that 'a wizard did it,' but it does seem likely, given that the alphabet has seen extensive use as a system of magic notation in spell-books and scrolls. There possibly was a time when wizards used it as code, before it was as well-traveled a tongue as today.

Finally, did Draconic spawn all other mortal languages, as the chromatic dragons love to imply? The answer, simply put, is of course not.

It is true that Draconic is one of the oldest languages in the entire multiverse, and has remained monolithic and unchanged since it appeared, but the evidence that it is the head of a language family simply isn't there.



CELESTIAL

Celestial is the first language we've touched on which is truly alien in nature.

It is cosmetically similar to Elven but functionally very different. It does make sense that folk would make the connection, however, as the aesthetic pleasantness of Elven derives from it's spark of divinity.

Celestial is Power Divine incarnate, as are the celestial outsiders who speak it.

When spoken, the tongue is exceedingly beautiful, and possesses the ability to endear itself specifically to the tastes of the listener, confirmed by the Matchbook-Oszmenos study.

For the uninitiated, they had a Deva stand in a room in sing to several different small groups, and then surveyed the audiences to find out what they liked about it. Some said they though the Deva had a nice baritone. Others said the harmonies were nice. What's more, everything that a subject came up with was in there; Celestial tends to sound multi-layered, or like many voices are speaking at once. The mortal brain tends to focus on the one it thinks sounds the nicest, apparently.

That's not to say you can't hear the rest of the choir when you listen to Celestial. Pay attention and you can certainly hear the harmonising of an angelic host, but I wouldn't recommend concentrating on it for too long.

Like I said before, it's an outsider tongue, and that makes it fundamentally different to the languages our brains can handle. It's polite enough to supply a path of least resistance, so my advice is to go with it.

The other fun thing that Celestial does is summon a cool breeze, no matter where you are. Indoors, outdoors, Oerth, Athas... Celestial manifests at least partially as a tangible disturbance of the air, which rustles nearby leaves, jingles nearby wind chimes... you get the idea.

The language is impossible to trace back anywhere, other than to say it's old. You can usually bet that ancient things can speak it, or at least understand it.

Krakens, for example, have little business speaking to anyone, but know it nevertheless.



INFERNAL

Infernal is the language of the Nine Hells of Baator, and the Baatezu - or Devils - who reside there. It is one of the more difficult languages to learn, and demands a lot from the speaker, unless they are lucky enough to actually be a Devil, in which case it's second-nature.

As I alluded in the Foreword, Infernal is painful. The exact phonology of Infernal speech demands biting your own tongue to speak it, but forked tongues often get away without harm.

It's not uncommon to see blood trickling from the corners of the mouth of a mortal speaking Infernal. Speak it long enough, and your teeth will *make* you a forked tongue.

Beside the physical sacrifices, learning to speak Infernal involves a remarkable amount of rote learning.

There are multiple genders, cases, various other inflections... some letters of it's alphabet must be written in red instead of black ink, otherwise the meaning is lost or confused... and all in the service of just bogging the tongue down with rules.

I spent some time being taught it by a Pit Fiend who owed me a favour, and I should add to my report that they admitted the grammatical system of Infernal is so convoluted solely so Baatezu have more excuses to police it when non-native speakers make mistakes.

The vast rule-sets of Infernal do make it particularly suited for one specific task; passing judgement. The courts of the Nine Hells are well known for their rigorous documentation, and it is noteworthy that a tiny fraction of non-baatezu justice systems have adopted Infernal in order to make their court documentation bulletproof.

Due to this, you may have heard some Cagers in Sigil refer to the language as 'Legalese.'

ABYSSAL

Just when you thought Infernal was bad, next we have Abyssal. Abyssal is the language of the Tanar'ri, or Demons, who hail from the Endless Layers of the Abyss, which makes sense.

The language is an extension of the Tanar'ri, as they are an extension of the swirling chaos that spawned them.

As an expression of chaos, Abyssal follows no rules. None of it means anything.

Demons speaking it are literally making it up as they go along, but it somehow passes meaning and information between them anyway.

When written, it uses the Infernal alphabet, and it's only recently that linguists have settled on the theory that Tanar'ri like to use the Infernal alphabet in an attempt to sow chaos. By writing in the Infernal script, they water it down, confusing people who come across Abyssal without realizing it (which has happened to me), and generally corrupting Infernal from within.

Learning to speak or read it requires you to truly be able to think chaotically. It is difficult - but possible - to convince yourself that you know it, and start to be able to draw meaning from the vast range of growling and screaming Demons employ.

Reading it requires looking beyond the letters, at what the one writing them down was thinking or feeling which lead to them choosing those particular patterns. It may sound impossible, but one should not underestimate the power of belief.

When questioning a Marilith on the subject, they told me, and I quote, "aren't all languages just randomly made up?" This is, of course, absolutely correct.



PRIMORDIAL

Primordial is the first language we've touched on with what I call Universal Dialects. That is- no matter what plane you're on, the language always breaks down into the same groups. Knowing one doesn't preclude you from understanding another, but the finer points can sometimes be lost between them.

But a few notes first on the language as a whole; if any language has a basis to claim it's a proto-language, it's probably Primordial.

Once you get back far enough in time it's essentially impossible to prove, but there's solid evidence that Primordial has influenced a vast number of other languages.

It was possibly even used as the basis for ancient Dwarvish, when Moradin created them.

This is not, however why the Primordial language uses the Dwarvish alphabet. That's likely a matter of simple ease of use for the mortals who started transcribing it from elementals, as Dwarvish was probably an established alphabet at that point.

As the domain of elementals, many think that the dialects are much more different than they actually are. It's important when learning Primordial not to mistake the timbre of an elementals voice, which is often strange and unsettling, for the dialect of the language itself, which actually lends itself to mortal physiology just fine.

My teacher of Auran was an Aarakocra, for example. That became a difficulty in and of itself, because of the accent imparted by her beak, but the point is that Primordial is not too difficult to learn, as it is constructed from extremely basic, fundamental structures.

You might even call them elemental, I suppose. Nouns in particular tend to be short and snappy; um, ish, en, ame,* etc.

**father, mother, brother, sister*

PRIMORDIAL DIALECTS

AURAN

The only difference between Auran and other Primordial dialects is aspiration. While aspiration is allophonic in other dialects, it is phonological in Auran, and meaning switches based on how forcefully you expel air on some consonants.

AQUAN

Aquan is extremely flexible, and affords the speaker a lot of freedom in repurposing words via derivational morphology. Moradin likely took this specific feature for Dwarvish. Using this feature on other dialects is still understandable, but tends to sound strange, akin to how slapping the -er suffix on something that doesn't need it in Common might sound.

TERRAN

Terran is hard to pin down, as those who speak in natively, like Xorn, mostly sound like a collapsing tunnel. There is nothing particularly special about it, other than it being used most often out of the four dialects as 'basic' Primordial. It's generally seen as the normal language, from which the others differ.

IGNAN

Ignan adds a single phoneme that the other dialects lack; an alveolar lateral click. It can add distinct meaning to a word in some circumstances, but is mostly used to express emotion, and is employed extensively in the City of Brass, having become a local affectation. Some have likened the sound to the crackling of embers, when surrounded by it being performed by the populace on the city's streets.

DEEP SPEECH

The aberrations of the Far Realm are so utterly external to the nature of the planes, and so widely varied in the forms they take, that their language is one of the few anchoring points we have in the quest to understand them.

Some aberrations have alphabets, such as Qualith, a braille-like system used by the Illithids, but it would be a mistake to think it encompasses Deep Speech. Qualith is more akin to bullet points - or a shopping list - than anything comprehensive.

In order to serve all aberrations, the language is not bound by many of the same things that a humanoid species may take for granted.

For instance, much of our languages are rooted in extremely fundamental things. Our expressions for time passing; forward and back, are grounded in the most basic of movements we make with our body. But how does an aberration with radial symmetry - like a jellyfish has - think about time? Up and down? And how to reconcile this concept with the many different physiological variants among aberrations? Chuuls walk, Beholders float, Aboleths swim, and yet they all understand the same deep rumbling.

So, by studying the language, we study perhaps the only thing they have ever had in common.

Deep Speech is likely named as such for its cosmetic similarity to the vocalisations of deep sea fauna. It consists largely of extended sounds, that don't require complicated lips or teeth to pronounce.

With a little practice, anyone with a throat can approximate the sounds, though I don't think there's consensus on accents yet.

It's been described as like the creaking of a boat on the waves, or the grinding of tectonic plates, punctuated with high-pitched piping and whistling.

It's theorised that the Far Realms require these extremes of possible frequencies in order for sound waves to carry through the atmosphere at all.

But then again, aberrations capable of speaking it usually possess telepathy, and wouldn't need it, even to speak with each other, as they have the option of instantly disseminating information among nearby sentient minds at will.

So why does it even exist? Did they create it specifically to try to speak with us?

We'll just go ahead and move on.





SYLVAN

Elven, you may have noticed, stands out a touch from the other Standard Languages. It has streaks of Celestial in it, due to the divine ancestry of the elves, but there is another language we can thank for imbuing Elven with its distinctive musicality.

I speak of course of Sylvan, the language of the Feywild. Elven sounds more like Sylvan than it does Celestial, and this is because elves actually spent a fair amount of time in the Feywild before descending into the material planes with the other mortal species.

This is why elves are often said to have *Fey Ancestry*. Plus, Elven really hasn't had much meaningful contact with Celestial as a language, but has had lots of contact with Sylvan. But I digress! This section isn't about Elven.

Sylvan is a strong contender for the most dangerous of all languages we've covered.

It can sound like nearly anything you want it to, for starters. There is a raw magic in Sylvan that layers it with auditory illusions. Voices become mutable and untamed, and it may become difficult to know what the 'true' accent of a speaker is. You could, for example, alter the pitch of your voice as you spoke, if you knew how to master it. Or punctuate your sentences with lion growls, if you practice enough.

Having the voice control to sing in Sylvan is hard indeed, but rewarding.

And this is just the beginning! That deep, primal magic flowing through the language also twists and turns your words while you speak them.

Any emotion you might be feeling while speaking is magnified. You may have a pang of regret while constructing a sentence, and then look up at the crowd and realise you've just poured your heart out.

Or, imagine, if you will, a tiny kernel of anger in your heart as you lie through your teeth to a fey queen. You'll be lucky if the language doesn't append a curse to the end of whatever you're saying.

There are some who can control this, but amateur speakers are often caught off guard by it.

Sylvan also has a reputation for being charming- that is, literally, in the sense of charming and controlling those that hear it, but this association has been derived mostly from the Modus Operandi of those who natively speak it.

UNDERCOMMON

Undercommon, the primary language of the Underdark, is fascinating, and a personal favourite of mine!

Firstly, it's got next to nothing to do with Common. It's written in the Elvish alphabet, and is influenced mostly by Elvish, Dwarvish, Goblin, and Deep Speech of all things, with a few touches here and there from both Infernal and Abyssal.

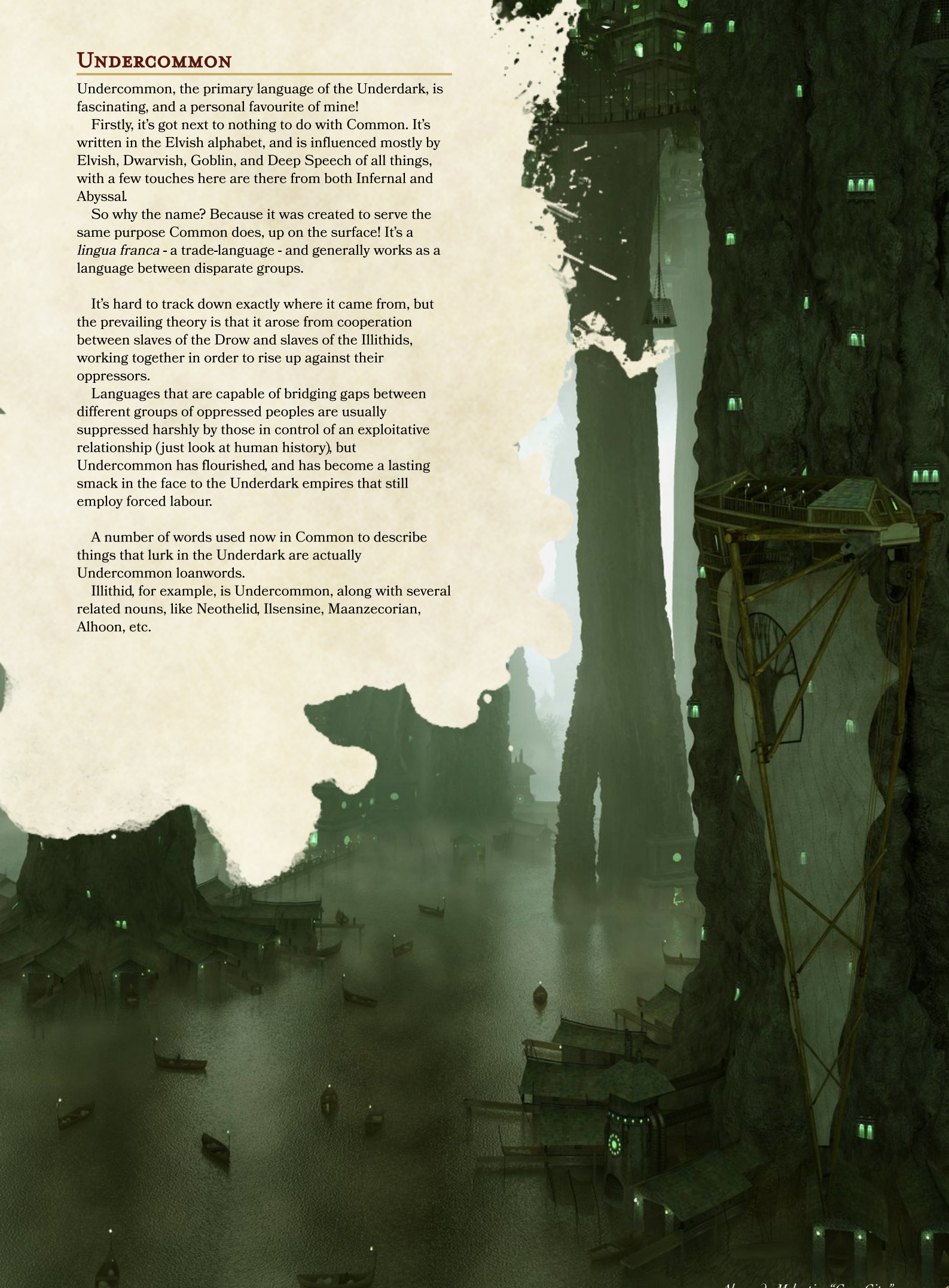
So why the name? Because it was created to serve the same purpose Common does, up on the surface! It's a *lingua franca* - a trade-language - and generally works as a language between disparate groups.

It's hard to track down exactly where it came from, but the prevailing theory is that it arose from cooperation between slaves of the Drow and slaves of the Illithids, working together in order to rise up against their oppressors.

Languages that are capable of bridging gaps between different groups of oppressed peoples are usually suppressed harshly by those in control of an exploitative relationship (just look at human history), but Undercommon has flourished, and has become a lasting smack in the face to the Underdark empires that still employ forced labour.

A number of words used now in Common to describe things that lurk in the Underdark are actually Undercommon loanwords.

Illithid, for example, is Undercommon, along with several related nouns, like Neothelid, Ilsensine, Maanzecorian, Alhoon, etc.



CODED LANGUAGES

The multiverse is lousy with coded languages, but by definition they're secretive, hidden things. When someone makes a code, they typically make it to order- to hide a particular item, to connect a particular group... but two have grown enough to become true languages.

THEIVES CANT

Also known as Rogue's Cant, or Peddler's Elvish, there's lots of dialects of Theives Cant, but the concepts are usually easy to translate, as they tend to encode similar networks of nouns and verbs; money, pickpocketing, dying... you know. The usual thief fare.

In any case, Theives Cant is an oddball. It's written form has nothing to do with it's spoken form, and they are used in entirely different circumstances. Technically, they might be different languages, but popular opinion names them as one.

When written, Cant takes the form of small coded signs that are carved, painted, or otherwise described in public spaces, used to mark structures, or anything else that makes sense.

These symbols can be used to warn a Rogue that a house is under someones protection, and cannot be robbed, or that it contains a friend who will give you a place to lie low, and so on.

I feel that most folks already have a general understanding of these, and so I'll admit I'm glossing over them, but really, they're right there. You can just go and look at them. They're not very hard to figure out, either.

The spoken language is were Cant really shines. The code essentially imbues any language with two meanings. You have the surface level interpretation in the original language, and then a secondary, sub-surface interpretation that is disseminated at the same time.

Rogues who know Cant can hear both of these lingual structures at once, constantly. Most of the time people are saying nothing but piffle, and so Rogues can ignore it. When it starts suddenly making sense, a Rogue knows they have to pay attention.

When done properly, Rogues speak Cant to each other in every conversation.

In keeping with standard cryptographic practice, Rogues learn to use it to encode everything they want to say to each other, so there is no differentiation to outside observers between important and unimportant encoded information. If there are two Rogues in a room, always assume they are speaking Cant, even if they have little reason to.

Most likely, they're just practicing by making fun of you in front of your back.

So, how does it work? Do all words in every language have dual meanings to a Rogue? Not quite. Some do in Common, such as academy referring to a brothel, and gin referring to diamonds, but many rely on context.

It's noteworthy that lexical entries can change when combined with various sleight of hand gestures. Therefore, the semantics of the code are very fluid, and this makes it tricky for someone like me to tell everyone how to speak it. Not to mention words in Rogue's Cant come in and out of fashion. Keeping a working knowledge of it demands the Rogue in question use it often.



DRUIDIC

The secret language of Druids uses its own alphabet, or so I hear. It might be the only language in this list I've never heard, as Druids who are taught the language are forbidden to teach it to non-Druids.

Despite that, you may have seen it around. The written form consists of letters that are written in simple sets of lines. The Druid in question will often decorate with extra lines and spirals, in order to obfuscate the meaning. It can be written vertically or horizontally.

As far as I know, this is barely a fraction of Druidic, as any Druid I've spoken to about it has laughed and confessed that only the most basic ideas can be conveyed in writing.

Through my interviews, I also learned its primarily used for ceremonial rites, gatherings of Druids where not using it would mark you as an uninvited guest, the casting of certain spells, and identifying of other Druids in disguise.

They try not to speak it around other folks if they can avoid it, unlike Cant, because they don't even really want people to learn what it sounds like.

One Druid I spoke to mentioned that some wily Rangers have since squeezed the language out of Treants, who were taught it by Druids at some point.

They didn't seem to think Rangers would be able to do much with it other than act smug, which seems in keeping with the Rangers I know.

BACKWORD

Well, that's it! If you've found this treatise at all interesting or informative, do let me know! You can find me most days at the Civic Festhall, in the Clerk's Ward of Sigil. Just ask for Milori! If enough folks come by and tell me they liked it, perhaps there'll be time to write on some really interesting languages, like Grung! Or the pheromone-telepathy of the Thri-Kreen!

In any case, I do hope it's been useful to you, and given you at least a starting point to work from when encountering these languages out in the planes. Good luck out there, Cutters!

CREDITS

A big warm thank you to all the artists who graciously allowed me to use their work- this treatise wouldn't look any good without them!

ARTWORK

[Racoon Artworks](#)

Cave of Forgotten Books (Cover)

[Anna Verhoog](#)

Lillend (Pg. 1)

Lady of the Lake (Pg. 14)

[Rostyslav Zagornov](#)

Dungeons and Dragons (Pg. 2)

[Matt Forsyth](#)

Hunting the Dragon (Pg. 3)

[Tomas Duchek](#)

Paladin (Pg. 4)

[Stepan Alekseev](#)

Run! (Pg. 5)

[Sean Randolph](#)

Aer Voldr - Giant's library (Pg. 6)

[Dani Hartel](#)

Victors (Pg. 7)

[Godfrey Escota](#)

Forging Heat (Pg. 8)

[Matheus Graef](#)

Otül the Stormbringer (pg. 9)

[Andrew Mar](#)

Resting Place (Pg. 10)

The Patriot (Pg. 11)

[Stephen Wood](#)

AD&D Monster Redesign - Aarakocra (Pg. 12)

[Alexandr Melentiev](#)

Cave City (Pg. 15)

[Rhys Griffiths](#)

A Game of Daggers (Pg. 16)

[Veli Nyström](#)

Prophet of Dark Forest (Pg. 17)

[Efflam Mercier](#)

Apprentices (Pg. 18)

WRITING

S. T. Mannell

www.crypticparlour.com